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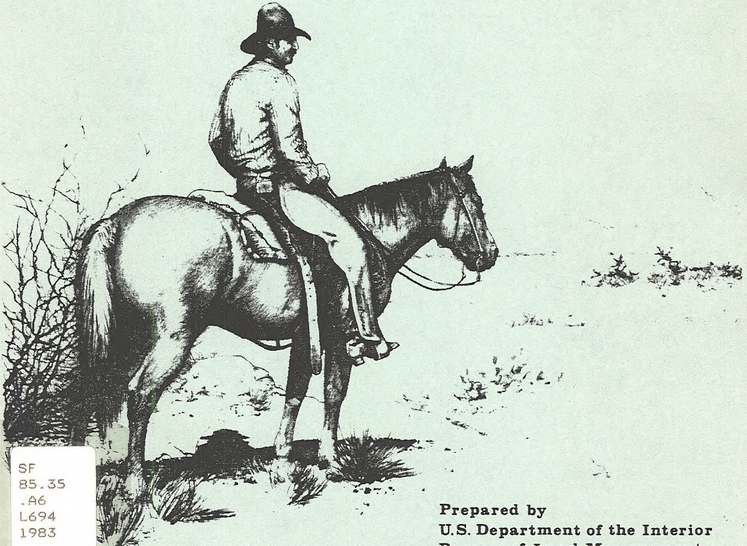
RANGELAND PROGRAM SUMMARY



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Prepared by
U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Arizona

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

PHOENIX DISTRICT OFFICE
2929 WEST CLARENDON AVENUE
PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85017

IN REPLY REFER TO
4427 (027)

February 24, 1983

The following report is the Rangeland Program Summary for the Lower Gila North Grazing Environmental Impact Statement. This report summarizes the rangeland management actions the Bureau of Land Management plans to take on public lands within the Lower Gila North Planning Area.

Your comments on the contents of this summary are welcome and will be considered in preparing individual grazing decision. Written comments should be received by March 31, 1983 and should be sent to the following address:

Phoenix District Office
Bureau of Land Management
2929 West Clarendon Avenue
Phoenix, Arizona 85017

Thank you for your interest in BLM's rangeland management program.

Sincerely,

W K Barker

William K. Barker
District Manager

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RANGELAND MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
LOWER GILA NORTH PLANNING AREA
Bureau of Land Management, Phoenix District, Arizona

February 1983

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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes rangeland management actions to be taken on public lands in the Lower Gila North Planning Area (LGN) in Mohave, Yuma, Yavapai, and Maricopa Counties, Arizona and serves as the LGN Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Record of Decision. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has determined that the actions are needed as part of a long-term program to restore public rangelands to a satisfactory condition and provide for the full range of resource needs based on principles of multiple use and sustained yield.

These decisions follow completion of an EIS for the planning area in September 1982. The EIS described the consequences of five alternatives for grazing management on 1,393,000 acres of public lands. Options selected were based on significant issues identified during preparation of the Management Framework Plan (MFP or land use plan) in 1981. The program is intended to reach the following objectives:

1. Improve ecological rangeland conditions of public lands in LGN over a 20-year period.

2. In 20 years, increase public rangeland forage for consumptive uses by 40 percent.

3. Reduce short-term disruption and ensure the long-term stability of the local livestock industry and the economy of communities dependent upon public lands.

4. Maintain a viable wild burro population in the Alamo Herd Management Area, in balance with the habitat and other multiple uses. Ensure enough forage as well as access to water for burros.

5. Within 10 years, improve habitat on public land for upland and small game. Enhance wildlife populations by improving structural habitat diversity and rangeland condition. Within 20 years, improve big-game habitat on public land throughout the EIS area to support reasonable numbers of big game.

6. Within 10 years, improve the habitats of 26 protected or special-status animal species on 1 million acres of public land and maintain them in satisfactory condition.

7. Protect the habitats of sensitive, state-listed, or federally listed plant species. Maintain species diversity and allow recovery of disturbed sites in six significant botanical areas within the EIS area.

8. Restore deteriorated riparian habitats along the Bill Williams, Santa Maria, and Hassayampa Rivers and improve 6,000 acres of wetlands on Centennial Wash. Thereafter, maintain the following habitats in satisfactory condition: 900 acres of cottonwood-willow habitat, 1,200 acres of mixed broadleaf habitat, 9,000 acres of mesquite-saltcedar habitat, and 25 miles of aquatic habitat.

THE PROGRAM

BLM selected an updated version of the Proposed Action as the LGN Rangeland Management Program. Managers determined that the Proposed Action best met the planning area's social, economic, and environmental needs. The Proposed Action, as originally outlined, was modified to include recent changes in BLM's Grazing Management Policy.

The Proposed Action in the LGN EIS grouped allotments into three management categories based on their potential. These categories and criteria for inclusion therein are listed below:

1. Intensive Grazing Management

    - Allotments produce less than their potential.
    - Unsatisfactory condition or trend.
    - Good potential for improvement under management.
    - Favorable benefit-cost (B/C) ratio.

2. Less Intensive Grazing Management

    - Satisfactory ecological condition.
    - Stable or upward apparent trend.
    - Satisfactory management.

3. Nonintensive Grazing Management

    - Ephemeral designation.
    - Low potential for vegetation improvement.
    - Small amounts of public land where management is impractical.

BLM's new Grazing Management Policy, likewise, groups allotments in three categories on the basis of potential for improvement. These categories and criteria are listed below:

1. Improve Category Criteria

    - Present range condition is unsatisfactory.
    - Allotments are producing at low to moderate levels and have potential for increased production.
    - Significant resource-use conflicts/controversy exist.
    - Opportunities exist for positive economic return from public investments.
    - Present management appears unsatisfactory.

2. Maintain Category Criteria

- Present range condition is satisfactory.
- Allotments are producing near their potential (or trend is moving in that direction).
- No significant resource-use conflicts/controversy exist.
- Opportunities may exist for positive economic return from public investments.
- Present management appears satisfactory.

3. Custodial Category Criteria

- Present range condition is not a factor.
- Allotments have low resource production potential and are producing near their potential.
- Limited resource-use conflicts/controversy exist.
- Opportunities for positive economic return on public investment do not exist or are constrained by technological or economic factors.
- Present management appears satisfactory or is the only logical practice under existing resource conditions.

Although the intensive, less intensive, and nonintensive categories are similar to the improve, maintain, and custodial categories, respectively, the differences in criteria, the greater emphasis on resource conflict considerations, and a new method of benefit-cost analysis have resulted in grouping allotments differently from those in the EIS. After consultation with the Phoenix-Lower Gila Grazing Advisory Board, the allotments in LGN were categorized and ranked within each category on the basis of the criteria discussed above. Table 1 presents this classification and ranking of allotments.

Initially, the permittee's grazing preferences in LGN will remain unchanged under this program and use will not be adjusted. All use adjustments will be based on monitoring studies as discussed in the Monitoring Section of this report. Although the allotment categorization in the Rangeland Management Program differs from that in the Proposed Action, the measures for resource protection and enhancement remain unchanged.

This categorization process as well as the allotment ranking for investment are dynamic processes. As conditions change, allotments may be placed in a different category.

IMPROVE CATEGORY

Allotments in the Improve (I) category require either a change in management practices to improve conditions and achieve a relatively high resource potential or mitigation of serious resource conflicts or controversy.

TABLE 1
CLASSIFICATION AND RANKING OF ALLOTMENTS IN LGN

IMPROVE CATEGORY

1. Babcock
2. Sitgreaves-Red Hill and Garcia*
3. Moralez
4. Medd
5. Bar D Four
6. Coughlin "A"
7. Ohaco and Echeverria*
8. Wickenburg "A" and "B"*
9. Palmerita
10. Aguila
11. Santa Maria

MAINTAIN CATEGORY

1. Los Caballeros
2. Lamberson
3. Cactus Garden
4. Carco
5. Hancock
6. Rees
7. Harcuvar
8. Leidig
9. Loma Linda
10. Effus
11. Jones
12. Ridgeway-Kong
13. Narramore
14. Orosco
15. 6y Eagle Eye
16. Pipeline

CUSTODIAL CATEGORY (Not Ranked)

Auza
Alamo
Bialac
Bodfish
Brown, Buck
Cain
Calhoun
Carter
Carter Herrera
Central AZ
Couglin "B"
Cross Mountain
Date Creek
Desert Hills "A" & "B"*
Douglas
Eagle Eye
Ekvall
Flat Iron
Foraker
Globe
Gordon, R.
Grantham
Hassayampa
Hawkins

Heine
Houge Produce
James, H.
Jenner
KMJ
Park, H.
Park, R.
Park, R. & E.
Peters
Primrose
R. Santa Ynez
Saddle Mountain
Salome Community
Satathite
Sky Arrow
Sprouse
Thompson
Turner
Van Keuren
Vasilius
Wellik
Whitehead
Wilson
48. White Tanks

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* Denotes two allotments run as one livestock operation.

Generally, the cost of improving conditions on I allotments would be exceeded by the resulting economic benefits. The management objective for I allotments is to improve current unsatisfactory resource conditions. Therefore, I allotments will have first priority for range improvement funding, allotment management plan (AMP) development, monitoring, and use supervision. (See Table 2 for the LGN AMP implementation schedule.) Range condition and trend, utilization, precipitation, and actual livestock use will be monitored on all I allotments.

MAINTAIN CATEGORY

Generally, allotments in the Maintain (M) category have no serious resource conflicts, and range condition and present management are satisfactory. The management objective for M allotments is to maintain current resource conditions. Range condition and trend, utilization, precipitation, and actual livestock use will be monitored on M allotments by priority ranking as funding permits. M allotments will have second priority for funding of range improvements and for AMP development.

CUSTODIAL CATEGORY

Allotments in the Custodial (C) category include those with ephemeral designation, those with a small percentage of public land, or those with low resource potential where response to management would not yield positive economic returns. The management objective for this category is to employ minimum management to the allotments, while protecting existing resource values.

Significant riparian values identified in the LGN EIS will be monitored in the Alamo allotment and the Carson and Globe leases. C allotments will have third priority for funding of range improvements and for AMP development. Permittees will assume a major role in range monitoring and range improvement construction for C allotments. BLM will conduct periodic use supervision on these allotments.

PROGRAM IMPACTS

Once grazing systems are implemented and rangeland developments built, plant composition, production, and vigor will gradually improve. Moreover, the construction of new stock waters will increase the amount of forage available for harvest by livestock and wildlife. As more and better quality forage becomes available, livestock performance will improve. Likewise, increased vegetation production will improve big-game, small-game, and upland game habitat and increase big-game numbers. Additional waters will benefit water-dependent species. Increased ground cover will notably improve nongame habitat, especially the lower vegetation layers needed for cover by many species.

TABLE 2
LGN AMP IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

FISCAL YEAR	ALLOTMENTS
1983	Babcock Sitgreaves-Red Hill and Garcia*
1984	Moralez Medd
1985	Bar D Four Coughlin "A"
1986	Ohaco and Echeverria* Wickenburg "A" & "B"*
1987	Palmerita
1988	Aguila
1989	Santa Maria

* Denotes two allotments run as one livestock operation.

CONFLICT MITIGATION

Major resource conflicts will be mitigated by intensive grazing management on the Babcock and Garcia allotments. Crucial wildlife habitat, including 6,000 acres of wetlands and 800 acres of riparian habitat, will be contained in a separate pasture on the Babcock allotment, permitting special management of this unique aquatic habitat. By improving the vigor and reproduction of shoreline vegetation and other plant cover, nesting and resting opportunities will be enhanced for such protected species as the great egret, the snowy egret, and the black-crowned night heron. On the Garcia allotment, 80 acres of crucial riparian habitat along the Hassayampa River will be managed to enhance cottonwood reproduction and maintain shoreline vegetation for wildlife cover. Desert tortoise habitat on the Garcia allotment will be managed to assure adequate forage for the tortoise population. Winter-spring annual forage will be reserved for the tortoise to provide the energy needed for the year's reproduction.

Additional Allotment Management Plans, Burro Herd Management Plans, and Wildlife Habitat Management Plans will be written and implemented to achieve the program objectives listed in the Introduction Section of this report.

ALTERNATIVES

Continuation of Present Grazing Management (No Action) proposes no change in grazing from the present. Stocking levels would remain at recognized grazing preferences, and forage would not be allocated to burros and big game. BLM would hold wild burro populations to existing numbers. No intensive grazing systems would be developed. Yearlong grazing would continue on 32 allotments, nonintensive grazing on 14 allotments, and ephemeral grazing on 2 allotments. BLM would construct rangeland developments needed for the orderly use of the range.

The No-Action alternative was rejected because it would meet none of BLM's long-term objectives for rangeland management. It would not increase usable forage production and plant cover or improve rangeland condition. Vegetation would decline, and deteriorated riparian zones would not be restored. Soil conditions would not improve and little, if any, stabilization of soils would occur. Ground cover would generally decrease, and soil movement and erosion would increase. Soil compaction would increase on clayey soils, reducing water infiltration rates and water retention in the soils. Average sediment yield would increase. Small-game and nongame habitat would continue to deteriorate, and populations of all big-game species except javelina would decrease.

The No-Action alternative would adversely impact most burro-use areas by not allocating forage for burros. Declining rangeland condition and lowered productivity would harm the health of burro herds.

Elimination of Livestock Grazing would cancel all grazing preference on public lands. BLM would allocate forage and build and maintain rangeland developments for big game, burros, and other resource uses. To keep livestock off public lands, 1,500 miles of fence, 60 cattleguards, and 100 manual gates could be required. Livestock grazing would be phased out over a 5-year period. BLM would continue to monitor the rangeland for unauthorized use and wildlife conditions. This alternative would hurt ranchers most, forcing most out of business.

This alternative was not selected because it would not meet all management objectives, would not fulfill BLM's mandate for multiple use, and would impose severe economic impacts on livestock operators in the EIS area.

Seasonal Grazing proposes to implement seasonal livestock grazing from October 15 to June 1 on 35 allotments not now managed under intensive, custodial, or ephemeral grazing. It is designed to rest key species every year, to increase forage production, and to improve rangeland condition. Existing rangeland developments would be maintained, and sensitive resources protected. Initial stocking rates, big-game and wild burro forage allocations, and measures for resource protection and enhancement would be the same as under the Proposed Action. Forty-three allotments would be nonintensively managed as under the Intensive Grazing alternative.

As an option under Seasonal Grazing, eight allotments with low potential for perennial forage production would be classified and managed for ephemeral livestock grazing. Authorized grazing preferences would be canceled on these allotments, and livestock grazing would be authorized only when ephemeral forage is abundant. This alternative was rejected because it would impose unnecessary adverse socioeconomic impacts on livestock operators in the EIS area.

Intensive Grazing would implement intensive grazing management on 35 allotments not now managed under ephemeral or custodial grazing and continue intensive management on one allotment. Its purpose would be to generate greater and more rapid increases in forage production and improve rangeland condition throughout the EIS area. Grazing permittees would play a significant role in developing the grazing systems and would incur a greater share of the costs of building and maintaining rangeland developments. The remaining 43 allotments would be nonintensively managed because they are either designated ephemeral or have small amounts of public land.

Initial livestock forage allocations would be based on average licensed use during the past 5 years, an average 16 percent reduction in authorized grazing preference. Ten spring developments, 38 wells, 21 reservoirs, 10 miles of pipeline, and 122 miles of fence would be needed to implement Intensive Grazing at a cost of $1,307,600. Seven AMPs would be written in each of 5 years. All measures for resource protection and enhancement that would be applied under the Proposed Action would be applied under Intensive Grazing. Other elements of the program, including grazing systems, big-game and wild burro forage allocations, and implementation schedules would be the same as those under the Proposed Action.

Intensive Grazing is not cost effective and therefore unworkable under the new BLM Grazing Management Policy.

MONITORING

BLM will monitor the grazing management program to determine the effectiveness of grazing treatments and new rangeland developments and to determine whether AMP objectives are being met. Monitoring will provide information critical to managing and refining the program and provide the basis for making needed adjustments.

At a minimum, the monitoring studies on Improve and Maintain allotments will include actual yearly livestock use, forage utilization, trend in rangeland condition, and precipitation. Actual use figures from livestock operators are the foundations for grazing management adjustments, since utilization, condition and trend, and production have little value unless the grazing use is known. Each year specialists will study utilization, using the key forage plant method (an ocular estimate) or grazed class photo guides on one or more key forage plants. Rangeland specialists will also evaluate condition and trend studies at the end of each grazing treatment cycle to determine if condition is improving, declining, or stable. Trend will be measured using plant frequency and cover data and correlated to rangeland condition. To measure yearly changes in rainfall, BLM will install rain guages in key locations throughout the EIS area. Such information is important because the amount of precipitation greatly affects vegetation production and plant vigor and thus influences trend data. BLM will also design studies to ensure that the objectives of wildlife habitat management programs are being met.

When monitoring reveals that multiple use objectives are not being met, grazing systems will be modified, livestock numbers or kind of livestock changed, or additional rangeland developments built to reach the objectives. In some instances, rangeland management objectives may need to be reevaluated. Complete evaluation of monitoring studies will be made every 3 years on intensively managed allotments and every 5 years on allotments with continuous year-long grazing. Use adjustments will be made following the completion of these studies. For example, if monitoring studies show that trend is static or upward and utilization is less than 50 percent on the key species, the stocking rate would be increased. If studies show that trend is static or downward and utilization is more than 50 percent on the key species, the stocking rate would be decreased. To mitigate the effects of fluctuating ephemeral growths, permanent stocking increases or decreases will generally be held to a maximum of 15 percent in any one year. Use adjustments of more than 15 percent will be implemented over a 5-year period, subject to the findings of continuing monitoring studies.

The schedule for establishing monitoring studies on allotments in LGN is presented in Table 3.

DECISIONS

Proposed grazing decisions will be issued for all allotments in LGN. These decisions will document consultation effort and will describe grazing preference, initial stocking levels, multiple use management objectives, the monitoring studies that will be conducted, and how the information from the monitoring studies will be used to determine adjustments in stocking levels. In addition, the proposed decision will state that certified actual use will become a condition of the grazing permits. Proposed decisions for M, C, and I category allotments will be issued no later than June 1983, September 1983, and December 1984 respectively.

PROTESTS AND APPEALS

BLM will provide copies of specific allotment decisions on request. Decisions may be protested within 15 days of their receipt by permittees, lessees, or other persons adversely affected in

TABLE 3
LGN MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

FISCAL YEAR	ALLOTMENTS
1982	Aguila
	Babcock
	Bar D Four
	Hancock
	Moralez
	Ohaco and Echeverria*
	Pipeline
	Carco
1983	Alamo
	Coughlin "A"
	Sitgreaves-Red Hill and Garcia*
	Medd
	Palmerita
	Santa Maria
	Wickenburg "A" and "B"*
1984	Carson
	Effus
	Globe
	Harcuvar
	Jones
	Leidig
	Loma Linda
	Los Caballeros
	Rees
1985	Cactus Garden
	Lamberson
	Narramore
	Orosco
	Ridgeway-Kong
	6Y Eagle Eye

* Denotes two allotments run as one livestock operation.

accordance with 43 CFR Subpart 4160. Protests should be submitted to the Phoenix District Manager, Phoenix District Office, 2929 West Clarendon Avenue, Phoenix, Arizona 85017. Final decisions may also be appealed to the Phoenix District Manager within 30 days of their receipt.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Consultation and coordination have been an active part of the multiple use planning and EIS process in the Lower Gila North Planning Area. BLM will continue consultation with livestock operators, affected land owners, federal, state, and local agencies, and other organizations involved in rangeland management. BLM will examine inventory data, planning recommendations, and public comments on resource management in the area. Site-specific needs will be identified by allotment, including recommended studies, rangeland developments, types of grazing systems, and measures to restore riparian habitats. Should new information be presented during consultation that warrants adjustments, initial stocking levels and numbers or kinds of planned developments will be changed.

RANGELAND PROGRAM SUMMARY UPDATES

An update of this rangeland program summary will be published annually. The update will summarize decisions issued and decisions remaining to be issued, highlight activity plans scheduled for the following year, identify any significant changes in the program and reasons for those changes, and provide a summary of progress toward implementation of the rangeland management program.

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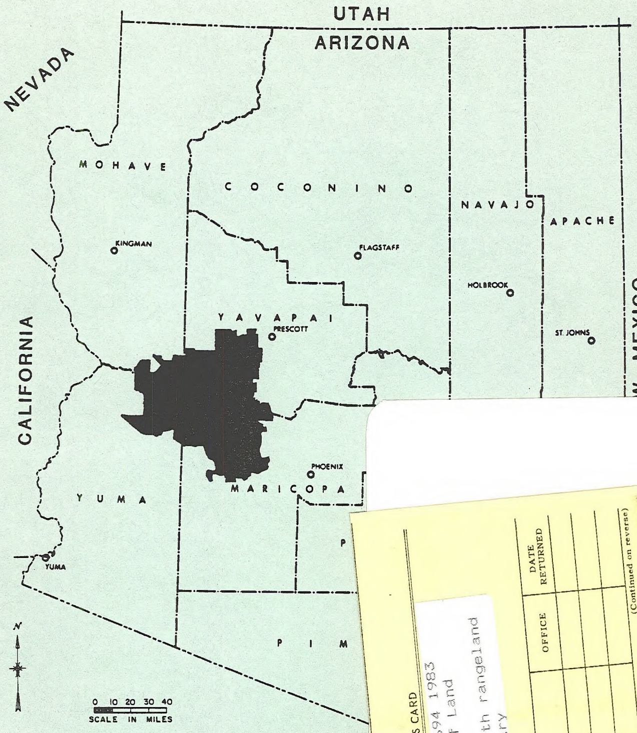

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LOCATION MAP

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